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WHITTIER'S "SNOW-BOUND"

A STUDY *and* INTERPRETATION

Whittier's "Snow-Bound"

A STUDY AND INTERPRETATION

WITH COMMENTS, OUTLINES, MAPS
NOTES, AND QUESTIONS

By

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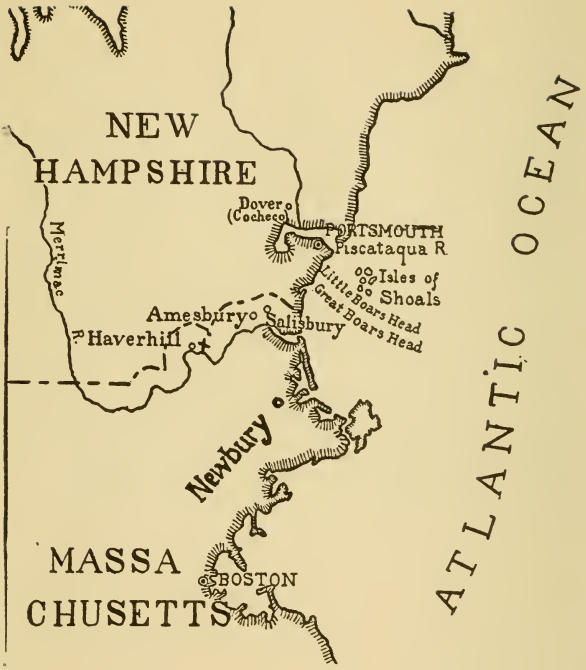
FOREWORD

This study and interpretation of "Snow-Bound" has been made with the hope that it may help to make the poem more known and better loved in the rural and graded schools. Its author has had constantly in mind the teacher who is burdened with many classes and has not had the opportunity to become a trained reader of literature, and the many boys and girls who would love "Snow-Bound" if they could more fully understand it. To such teachers and pupils the work is lovingly dedicated, with the suggestion that, in most cases, the poem be first read straight through by the class, that it then be read with the interpretation, stanza by stanza, until they can tell the main thread of the thought in their own words, after which the questions may be used. Above all, let there be much reading of the poem itself, and the committing of many passages to memory.



x WHITTIER FARM

SKETCH OF WHITTIER'S LIFE

"Snow-Bound" was written nearly half a century ago by John Greenleaf Whittier, the Quaker farmer-poet of New England. Mr. Whittier was fifty-nine years of age when he wrote the poem, and in it he gives an account of the doings of his own family, in his own home, during a certain stormy week in December when he was a boy probably not more than sixteen years of age.

And where was this farm home located? Notice (see map) the narrow, crooked strip of Massachusetts lying north of the Merrimac River after it crosses the New Hampshire line and turns to the eastward. This three-mile-wide strip, we are told by Mr. Pickard, was the poet's home during his entire life; and in its soil, in the Quaker cemetery at Amesbury, he, with the rest of the "Snow-Bound" household, lies buried. This is the Whittier country, the "Snow-Bound" country. When Mr. Whittier wrote the poem he was living at Amesbury, his home during the last fifty-six years of his life. The farm home about which he was writing was only nine miles away, to the southeast, near a road running between Amesbury and Haverhill. On this farm the poet was born, and there he lived until he was twenty-nine years old, when the family removed to Amesbury.

Not only was this old farm the poet's own birthplace, but at the time the family was snow-bound it had been the home of his Whittier ancestors for nearly two hundred years. His great-great-grandfather built and occupied the farmhouse and died there; also it had been

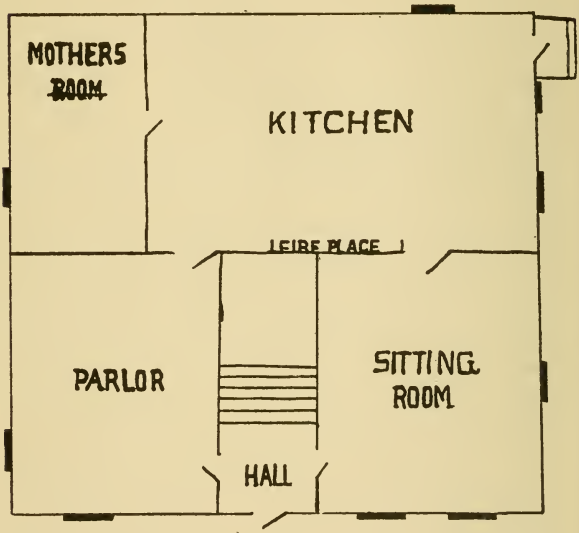
Drawn by a pupil from study of a description in Pickard's "Whittier Land"

WHITTIER'S HOME

owned and occupied by his great-grandfather, his grandfather, and his father. When they sold the farm and moved to Amesbury, Whittiers had lived on that farm one hundred and eighty-nine years, in that house one hundred and forty-eight years. It means something very real to Whittier then, when in the poem he speaks of "The old familiar sights of ours," of "The old, rude-furnished room," of "The white-washed wall and sagging beam." The farm was in a lonesome place surrounded by hills and woods in every direction except to the southeast, where a small brook that ran near the house found its way through level meadows to the Merrimac River only a mile and a half away. The house, sometimes spoken of as a mansion, was a large one, two and a half stories high, and about thirty-six feet square. It faced a little to the southeast, toward the valley of the brook, and the big kitchen, in which was the eight-feet-wide fireplace, was in the rear, on the north side. The house was so well built, with its beams of solid oak, that it stands today, kept in good repair by lovers of the poet, and is visited yearly by hundreds of people.

The snow-bound Whittier family consisted of eight people, four grown-ups and four children. The grown-ups were the father and his younger brother Moses, who owned and worked the farm together, and the mother and her younger sister, Mercy Hussey. This uncle and aunt always lived with the Whittier family and were most dearly loved by the children. Mary, the "elder sister," was a little over a year older than Greenleaf, as the poet was called in the home; his brother Franklin was five years younger, and Elizabeth, "youngest and dearest," was three years younger than Franklin. There was a schoolhouse half a mile up the road to the north, and here the children, when not snow-bound, and

when they could be spared from the work at home, went to school. The young man who was teaching in the Whittier district, during the winter of which the poet writes, was snow-bound with the family.



Drawn by a pupil from study of a description in Pickard's "Whittier Land"

GROUND-FLOOR PLAN OF THE WHITTIER HOME

The children's winter clothing was of "homespun," a cloth made of wool which was spun, woven, and made into clothing by the poet's mother and aunt. Although of wool, it was loose-meshed and stiff, and as there were no overcoats worn by the boys, and no soft, warm underclothing, they often suffered with

The chill no coat, however stout,
Of homespun stuff could quite shut out,
A hard, dull bitterness of cold,
That checked, mid-vein, the circling race,
Of life-blood in the sharpened face.

As soon as they were old enough the children all had to help with the work on the farm and in the house, the young genius who was to become one of our great American poets taking his full share with the rest. But evenings, after the chores were done, he wrote rhymes and verses on his slate; he also wrote many at school on various subjects.

Such was the family at the time of its being snow-bound. As we read the poem, however, we are compelled to think often of the man who wrote it, of the conditions under which he was living, and of his feelings at the time he was writing it. Therefore we shall have to take a little glance at the years and events that changed the observing Quaker-farmer boy of the poem into the gray-haired man of genius who, nearly fifty years later, in the little garden-room of his house in Amesbury, lonely even in the midst of the sweet June weather, wrote, no doubt with many tears:

O Time and Change!—with hair as gray
As was my sire's that winter day,
How strange it seems, with so much gone
Of life and love, to still live on!
. . . . . .
The birds are glad: the brier-rose fills
The air with sweetness; all the hills
Stretch green to June's unclouded sky;
But still I wait with ear and eye
For something gone which should be nigh,
A loss in all familiar things,
In flower that blooms, and bird that sings,

By the time Whittier was seventeen years old he had written many poems, most of which he had concealed in the attic. His sister was in the secret, however. She read, loved, and admired these productions, and thought her brother wonderful. She examined the poems published in the corner of their weekly newspaper and decided that some of her brother's were as good or better.

> . . . . . prompt to act,
> And make her generous thought a fact,

she selected one and sent it to the editor. On seeing it, he agreed with her exactly, and published it with a note saying that more from the same source would be gladly received. This editor was William Lloyd Garrison, then almost a boy himself, who afterward became the great Abolitionist and anti-slavery leader. He was so much impressed that he drove from Newburyport, where his paper was published, to the farm, and urged Whittier's father to send his son to school. But the father decided that his son's poetry would never bring his bread. Other poems were sent to the *Haverhill Gazette*, the paper published in their own near-by village, only three miles away. The editor of this paper was also deeply impressed, and soon he visited the farm on the same errand that had taken Garrison there, to urge Mr. Whittier to send his son to school. An academy was to be opened in Haverhill in the spring; Mr. Thayer, the editor, said he would take the boy into his own home. So the family decided that if Greenleaf could in any way earn the money to go, he might do so. A hired man taught him to make a new kind of slipper. He figured the expense of the school year closely, and made and sold slippers enough to meet them and have twenty-five cents left. He entered the new academy

when it opened, and composed and read an ode at its dedication exercises. He attended for six months, and at the end of the time, besides a wonderful development and a thousand new ideas, he carried home his extra, unused twenty-five cents. Then came a winter of country school teaching, and, with the money earned, another six months at the academy.

But now he must decide on what he was to do to earn a living. His poetry brought no income, he was not strong enough for heavy work on the farm, he could not go to college without going in debt or drawing too heavily on the home folks. An offer of editorial work in the city of Boston came, and he accepted it. He was only twenty-two years old; his whole life had been spent on the farm with the exception of the time spent in study at the academy. With little access to libraries and almost no association with literary people, his success in poetry and in editorial work at his age has been looked upon as almost miraculous. His editorial work brought him into connection with politics, and he proved to be a shrewd and able political leader. His success in this line made him ambitious to go farther. But as a Quaker and the son of his mother the tendency to be a reformer was in his blood. When the call came to him to join the Abolitionists and work for the freedom of the slave, he did it even though it meant, as he well knew it would, the giving up of both his political and literary ambitions. At that time "All the land was clay in slavery's hand." None but obscure abolition papers would publish his poems; as an Abolitionist he could not hope to be elected to office, for all over the country they were far more hated than even anarchists are now.

Whittier was twenty-five years old when he joined the Abolitionists. From that time till the close of the

Civil War, almost till the time of the writing of "Snow-Bound," battling with ill-health and poverty, he gave his time, influence, and genius to the work of helping the American people to see the wickedness of slavery. He was censured, he was derided, he was mobbed. At one time, in the city of Philadelphia, the building in which his publishing office was located was burned to the ground. Yet he worked steadily on. He wrote much, both in prose and poetry, for the freedom of the slave; he agitated, lectured, lobbied, edited papers, used his influence in politics. This influence was great enough to secure, in 1865, his election to the Massachusetts legislature. He served one term and was re-elected, but ill-health compelled him to resign.

The first change in the snow-bound family, save the gradual ones made by time, was the death, four or five years after the time of the scene of the poem, of the much-loved Uncle Moses. The father's death followed in 1830, when Whittier was only twenty-three. His sister Mary married and moved into a home of her own, also his brother Franklin. This left Whittier the care and companionship of his mother, sister, and aunt. In 1836 the farm was sold, and the family moved to Amesbury. Whittier never married. Owing to his ill-health and his devotion to an unpopular cause, they were compelled to practice the strictest economy, but they all did it cheerfully for the sake of the cause.

In 1857 the mother died. This sorrow was added to by indications of the oncoming of the bloody and dreadful Civil War. As a Quaker, Whittier had always abhorred war. His whole life had been devoted to the effort to help educate the American people up to the point of voluntarily freeing the slaves, because they should come to see that it was right and best. In 1860,

about the time the great struggle was beginning, his sister Mary died. Four years later, while it was still going on, even before there came the joyful "clang of bell and roar of gun" that announced the freedom of the slaves, his cherished companion and loved sister Elizabeth passed away. Her death occurred in September, 1864. In a few months the war was over, and the next June, when "brier and harebell bloomed again," Whittier was, in memory, living over the old days of the life on the farm, and writing "Snow-Bound" in loving "memory of the household it describes."

COMMENTS

"The love of liberty will not die out in the land while the youth of America learn and love the verse of the poet who combines the lofty inspiration of David with the sweet simplicity of Burns."—G. F. Hoar.

> "He pitied with brave words that echo yet,
> Th' old soldier, prisoned for a paltry debt;
> He helped to give a new and honored place
> To an unjustly subjugated race;
> And though of peaceful lineage and creed,
> Yet he could fight when conflict was the need;
> And he could mould the silver of his song
> In solid shot, to hurl 'gainst shame and wrong;
> And tyrants fell, and fetters burst in twain,
> Before the fierce artillery of his brain."
>
> —Will Carleton

"He had the touch of genius which transfigures common things. He sang of what he knew, the fields where he played as a boy, the river and the hills he had gazed on in childhood, the men and women who had grown up about him, the thoughts and the sentiments he and they had inherited together."

"This poem of New England was seen at once to be worthy of comparison with the 'Deserted Village' and with the 'Cotter's Saturday Night,' with more of the real flavor of the soil than Goldsmith's lines, and with less breadth, but no less elevation, than Burns's. It was received by the reading public as no other poem since Longfellow's 'Evangeline' and 'Hiawatha.' It

was so profitable that for the first time in his life—and he was then nearly sixty—Whittier was placed above want."—BRANDER MATTHEWS.

WHITTIER AS A FARMER

"A farmer's son,
Proud of field-lore and harvest craft and feeling
All their fine possibilities, how rich
And restful even poverty and toil
Become when beauty, harmony and love
Sit at their humble hearth as angels sat
At evening in the patriarch's tent, when man
Makes labor noble, and his farmer's frock
The symbol of a Christian chivalry."

—Whittier's Prelude to "Among the Hills."

"Out of doors the boy took his share of the farm duties, indeed too great a share, he afterward found, for his health. Inheriting the tall figure of his predecessors, he did not inherit their full strength; he was always engaged, like them, in subduing the wilderness; he had to face the cold of winter weather in what would now be called insufficient clothing; it was before that time when, in Miss Sedgwick's phrase, the Goddess of Health held out warm clothing to everybody. The barn, as Whittier himself afterward said, had no doors: the wind whistled through, and snow drifted on its floors for more than a century. There Whittier milked seven cows, and tended a horse, two oxen, and some sheep."—From Higginson's *Life of Whittier*.

"My ancestors since 1640 have been farmers in Essex County. I was early initiated into the mysteries of farming, and worked faithfully on the old Haverhill homestead until, at the age of thirty years, I was compelled to leave it, greatly to my regret. Ever since, if

I have ever envied anybody, it has been the hale, strong farmer."—Quoted from Whittier, in *Pickard's Life of Whittier.*

THE HOME AND ITS INMATES

"His house was one of the most delightful I ever knew, situated in a green valley, where was a laughing brook, fine old trees, hills near-by, and no end of wild flowers.

"The home was exceptionally charming on account of the character of its inmates. His father was a sensible and estimable man, his mother was serene, dignified, benevolent—a woman to honour and revere. His aunt, Mercy Hussey, was an incarnation of gracefulness and graciousness, of refinement and playfulness, an ideal lady. His sister Elizabeth shared his poetic gifts, was a sweet rare person, devoted to her family and friends, kind to everyone, full of love for all beautiful things, and so merry, when in good health, her companionship was always exhilarating. She was deeply religious, and so were they all."—From a letter by Miss Minot given in Higginson's *Life of Whittier.*

PERSONAL APPEARANCE IN YOUTH

"He was a very handsome, distinguished-looking young man. His eyes were remarkably beautiful. He was tall, slight, and very erect, a bashful youth, but never awkward."—Quoted from Miss Minot in Higginson's *Life of Whittier.*

SNOW-BOUND

A WINTER IDYL

TO THE MEMORY OF

THE HOUSEHOLD IT DESCRIBES

This Poem is Dedicated by the Author

"As the Spirits of Darkness be stronger in the dark, so Good Spirits which be Angels of Light are augmented not only by the Divine light of the Sun, but also by our common VVood Fire; and as the Celestial Fire drives away dark spirits, so also this our Fire of VVood doth the same."—*Cor. Agrippa, Occult Philosophy*, Book I, chap. v.

> "Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
> Arrives the snow; and, driving o'er the fields,
> Seems nowhere to alight; the whited air
> Hides hills and woods, the river and the heaven,
> And veils the farm-house at the garden's end,
> The sled and traveller stopped, the courier's feet
> Delayed, all friends shut out, the house-mates sit
> Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed
> In a tumultuous privacy of storm."—*Emerson.*

The sun that brief December day
Rose cheerless over hills of gray,
And, darkly circled, gave at noon
A sadder light than waning moon.
Slow tracing down the thickening sky
Its mute and ominous prophecy,
A portent seeming less than threat,
It sank from sight before it set.
A chill no coat, however stout,
Of homespun stuff could quite shut out,
A hard, dull bitterness of cold,

That checked, mid-vein, the circling race
Of life-blood in the sharpened face,
The coming of the snow-storm told.
The wind blew east; we heard the roar
Of Ocean on his wintry shore,
And felt the strong pulse throbbing there
Beat with low rhythm our inland air.

Meanwhile we did our nightly chores—
Brought in the wood from out-of-doors,
Littered the stalls, and from the mows
Raked down the herd's grass for the cows:
Heard the horse whinnying for his corn;
And, sharply clashing horn on horn,
Impatient down the stanchion rows
The cattle shake their walnut bows:
While, peering from his early perch
Upon the scaffold's pole of birch,
The cock his crested helmet bent
And down his querulous challenge sent.

Unwarmed by any sunset light,
The gray day darkened into night,
A night made hoary with the swarm
And whirl-dance of the blinding storm,
As zigzag wavering to and fro
Crossed and recrossed the wingèd snow:
And ere the early bed-time came
The white drift piled the window-frame,
And through the glass the clothes-line posts
Looked in like tall and sheeted ghosts.

So all night long the storm roared on:
The morning broke without a sun;
In tiny spherule traced with lines
Of Nature's geometric signs,
In starry flake, and pellicle,
All day the hoary meteor fell;
And, when the second morning shone,
We looked upon a world unknown,
On nothing we could call our own.
Around the glistening wonder bent
The blue walls of the firmament,
No cloud above, no earth below—
A universe of sky and snow!
The old familiar sights of ours
Took marvellous shapes; strange domes and towers
Rose up where sty or corn-crib stood,
Or garden wall, or belt of wood;
A smooth white mound the brush-pile showed,
A fenceless drift what once was road;
The bridle-post an old man sat
With loose-flung coat and high cocked hat;
The well-curb had a Chinese roof;
And even the long sweep, high aloof,
In its slant splendor, seemed to tell
Of Pisa's leaning miracle.

A prompt, decisive man, no breath
Our father wasted: "Boys, a path!"
Well pleased (for when did farmer boy
Count such a summons less than joy?)

Our buskins on our feet we drew;
With mittened hands, and caps drawn low,
To guard our necks and ears from snow,
We cut the solid whiteness through.
And, where the drift was deepest, made
A tunnel walled and overlaid
With dazzling crystal: we had read
Of rare Aladdin's wondrous cave,
And to our own his name we gave,
With many a wish the luck were ours
To test his lamp's supernal powers.
We reached the barn with merry din
And roused the prisoned brutes within.
The old horse thrust his long head out,
And grave with wonder gazed about;
The cock his lusty greeting said,
And forth his speckled harem led;
The oxen lashed their tails, and hooked,
And mild reproach of hunger looked;
The hornèd patriarch of the sheep,
Like Egypt's Amun roused from sleep,
Shook his sage head with gesture mute,
And emphasized with stamp of foot.

All day the gusty north-wind bore
The loosening drift its breath before;
Low circling round its southern zone,
The sun through dazzling snow-mist shone.
No church-bell lent its Christian tone
To the savage air, no social smoke
Curled over woods of snow-hung oak.

A solitude made more intense
By dreary-voicèd elements,
The shrieking of the mindless wind,
The moaning tree-boughs swaying blind,
And on the glass the unmeaning beat
Of ghostly finger-tips of sleet.
Beyond the circle of our hearth
No welcome sound of toil or mirth
Unbound the spell, and testified
Of human life and thought outside.
We minded that the sharpest ear
The buried brooklet could not hear,
The music of whose liquid lip
Had been to us companionship,
And, in our lonely life, had grown
To have an almost human tone.

As night drew on, and, from the crest
Of wooded knolls that ridged the west,
The sun, a snow-blown traveller, sank
From sight beneath the smothering bank,
We piled, with care, our nightly stack
Of wood against the chimney-back—
The oaken log, green, huge, and thick,
And on its top the stout back-stick;
The knotty forestick laid apart,
And filled between with curious art
The ragged brush; then, hovering near,
We watched the first red blaze appear,
Heard the sharp crackle, caught the gleam
On whitewashed wall and sagging beam,

Until the old, rude-furnished room
Burst, flower-like, into rosy bloom;
While radiant with a mimic flame
Outside the sparkling drift became,
And through the bare-boughed lilac-tree
Our own warm hearth seemed blazing free.
The crane and pendent trammels showed,
The Turks' heads on the andirons glowed;
While childish fancy, prompt to tell
The meaning of the miracle,
Whispered the old rhyme: "*Under the tree*
When the fire outdoors burns merrily,
There the witches are making tea."

The moon above the eastern wood
Shone at its full; the hill-range stood
Transfigured in the silver flood,
Its blown snows flashing cold and keen,
Dead white, save where some sharp ravine
Took shadow, or the sombre green
Of hemlocks turned to pitchy black
Against the whiteness at their back.
For such a world and such a night
Most fitting that unwarming light,
Which only seemed where'er it fell
To make the coldness visible.

Shut in from all the world without,
We sat the clean-winged hearth about,
Content to let the north-wind roar
In baffled rage at pane and door,

While the red logs before us beat
The frost-line back with tropic heat;
And ever, when a louder blast
Shook beam and rafter as it passed,
The merrier up its roaring draught
The great throat of the chimney laughed;
The house-dog on his paws outspread,
Laid to the fire his drowsy head,
The cat's dark silhouette on the wall
A couchant tiger's seemed to fall;
And, for the winter fireside meet,
Between the andiron's straddling feet,
The mug of cider simmered slow,
The apples sputtered in a row,
And, close at hand, the basket stood
With nuts from brown October's wood.

What matter how the night behaved?
What matter how the north-wind raved?
Blow high, blow low, not all its snow
Could quench our hearth-fire's ruddy glow.
O Time and Change!—with hair as gray
As was my sire's that winter day,
How strange it seems, with so much gone
Of life and love, to still live on!
Ah, brother! only I and thou
Are left of all that circle now—
The dear home faces whereupon
That fitful firelight paled and shone.
Henceforward, listen as we will,
The voices of that hearth are still;

Look where we may, the wide earth o'er,
Those lighted faces smile no more.
We tread the paths their feet have worn,
We sit beneath their orchard trees,
We hear, like them, the hum of bees
And rustle of the bladed corn;
We turn the pages that they read,
Their written words we linger o'er,
But in the sun they cast no shade,
No voice is heard, no sign is made,
No step is on the conscious floor!
Yet Love will dream, and Faith will trust
(Since He who knows our need is just),
That somehow, somewhere, meet we must.
Alas for him who never sees
The stars shine through his cypress-trees!
Who, hopeless, lays his dead away,
Nor looks to see the breaking day
Across the mournful marbles play!
Who hath not learned, in hours of faith,
The truth to flesh and sense unknown
That Life is ever lord of Death,
And Love can never lose its own!

We sped the time with stories old,
Wrought puzzles out, and riddles told,
Or stammered from our school-book lore
"The Chief of Gambia's golden shore."
How often since, when all the land
Was clay in Slavery's shaping hand,
As if a far-blown trumpet stirred

The langurous, sin-sick air, I heard
"*Does not the voice of reason cry,*
  '*Claim the first right which Nature gave,*
From the red scourge of bondage fly,
  Nor deign to live a burdened slave!' "
Our father rode again his ride
On Memphremagog's wooded side;
Sat down again to moose and samp
In trapper's hut and Indian camp;
Lived o'er the old idyllic ease
Beneath St. François' hemlock trees;
Again for him the moonlight shone
On Norman cap and bodiced zone;
Again he heard the violin play
Which led the village dance away,
And mingled in its merry whirl
The grandam and the laughing girl.
Or, nearer home, our steps he led
Where Salisbury's level marshes spread
  Mile-wide as flies the laden bee;
Where merry mowers, hale and strong,
Swept, scythe on scythe, their swaths along
  The low green prairies of the sea.
We shared the fishing off Boar's Head,
  And round the rocky Isles of Shoals
  The hake-broil on the drift-wood coals;
The chowder on the sand-beach made,
Dipped by the hungry, steaming hot,
With spoons of clam-shell from the pot.
We heard the tales of witchcraft old,
And dream and sign and marvel told

To sleepy listeners as they lay
Stretched idle on the salted hay,
Adrift along the winding shores,
When favoring breezes deigned to blow
The square sail of the gundelow,
And idle lay the useless oars.

Our mother, while she turned her wheel
Or run the new-knit stocking-heel,
Told how the Indian hordes came down
At midnight on Cochecho town,
And how her own great-uncle bore
His cruel scalp-mark to fourscore.
Recalling, in her fitting phrase,
So rich and picturesque and free,
(The common unrhymed poetry
Of simple life and country ways),
The story of her early days—
She made us welcome to her home;
Old hearths grew wide to give us room;
We stole with her a frightened look
At the gray wizard's conjuring book,
The fame whereof went far and wide
Through all the simple country-side;
We heard the hawks at twilight play,
The boat-horn on Piscataqua,
The loon's weird laughter far away;
We fished her little trout-brook, knew
What flowers in wood and meadow grew,
What sunny hillsides autumn-brown
She climbed to shake the ripe nuts down,

Saw where in sheltered cove and bay
The ducks' black squadron anchored lay,
And heard the wild-geese calling loud
Beneath the gray November cloud.
Then, haply, with a look more grave,
And soberer tone, some tale she gave
From painful Sewell's ancient tome,
Beloved in every Quaker home,
Of faith fire-winged by martyrdom,
Or Chalkley's Journal, old and quaint—
Gentlest of skippers, rare sea-saint!—
Who, when the dreary calms prevailed,
And water-butt and bread-cask failed,
And cruel, hungry eyes pursued
His portly presence mad for food,
With dark hints muttered under breath
Of casting lots for life or death,
Offered, if Heaven withheld supplies,
To be himself the sacrifice.
Then, suddenly, as if to save
The good man from his living grave,
A ripple on the water grew,
A school of porpoise dashed in view.
"Take, eat," he said, "and be content;
These fishes in my stead are sent
By Him who gave the tangled ram
To spare the child of Abraham."

Our uncle, innocent of books,
Was rich in lore of fields and brooks,
The ancient teachers never dumb

Of Nature's unhoused lyceum.
In moons and tides and weather wise,
He read the clouds as prophecies,
And foul or fair could well divine,
By many an occult hint and sign,
Holding the cunning-warded keys
To all the woodcraft mysteries;
Himself to Nature's heart so near
That all her voices in his ear
Of beast or bird had meanings clear,
Like Apollonius of old,
Who knew the tales the sparrows told,
Or Hermes, who interpreted
What the sage cranes of Nilus said;
A simple, guileless, childlike man,
Content to live where life began;
Strong only on his native grounds,
The little world of sights and sounds
Whose girdle was the parish bounds,
Whereof his fondly partial pride
The common features magnified,
As Surrey hills to mountains grew
In White of Selborne's loving view—
He told how teal and loon he shot,
And how the eagle's eggs he got,
The feats on pond and river done,
The prodigies of rod and gun;
Till, warming with the tales he told,
Forgotten was the outside cold,
The bitter wind unheeded blew:
From ripening corn the pigeons flew,

The partridge drummed i' the wood, the mink
Went fishing down the river-brink.
In fields with bean or clover gay,
The woodchuck, like a hermit gray,
  Peered from the doorway of his cell;
The muskrat plied the mason's trade,
And tier by tier his mud-walls laid;
And from the shagbark overhead
  The grizzled squirrel dropped his shell.

Next, the dear aunt, whose smile of cheer
And voice in dreams I see and hear—
The sweetest woman ever Fate
Perverse denied a household mate,
Who, lonely, homeless, not the less
Found peace in love's unselfishness,
And welcome wheresoe'er she went,
A calm and gracious element,
Whose presence seemed the sweet income
And womanly atmosphere of home—
Called up her girlhood memories,
The huskings and the apple-bees,
The sleigh-rides and the summer sails,
Weaving through all the poor details
And homespun warp of circumstance
A golden woof-thread of romance.
For well she kept her genial mood
And simple faith of maidenhood;
Before her still a cloud-land lay,
The mirage loomed across her way;
The morning dew, that dries so soon

With others, glistened at her noon;
Through years of toil and soil and care,
From glossy tress to thin gray hair,
All unprofaned she held apart
The virgin fancies of the heart.
Be shame to him of woman born
Who hath for such but thought of scorn.

There, too, our elder sister plied
Her evening task the stand beside;
A full, rich nature, free to trust,
Truthful and almost sternly just,
Impulsive, earnest, prompt to act,
And make her generous thought a fact,
Keeping with many a light disguise
The secret of self-sacrifice.
O heart sore-tried! thou hast the best
That Heaven itself could give thee—rest,
Rest from all bitter thoughts and things!
How many a poor one's blessing went
With thee beneath the low green tent
Whose curtain never outward swings!

As one who held herself a part
Of all she saw, and let her heart
Against the household bosom lean,
Upon the motley-braided mat
Our youngest and our dearest sat,
Lifting her large, sweet, asking eyes,
Now bathed within the fadeless green
And holy peace of Paradise.
Oh, looking from some heavenly hill,

Or from the shade of saintly palms,
Or silver reach of river calms,
Do those large eyes behold me still?
With me one little year ago:—
The chill weight of the winter snow
For months upon her grave has lain;
And now, when summer south-winds blow
And brier and harebell bloom again,
I tread the pleasant paths we trod,
I see the violet-sprinkled sod
Whereon she leaned, too frail and weak
The hillside flowers she loved to seek,
Yet following me where'er I went
With dark eyes full of love's content.
The birds are glad: the brier-rose fills
The air with sweetness; all the hills
Stretch green to June's unclouded sky;
But still I wait with ear and eye
For something gone which should be nigh,
A loss in all familiar things,
In flower that blooms, and bird that sings,
And yet, dear heart! remembering thee,
Am I not richer than of old?
Safe in thy immortality,
What change can reach the wealth I hold?
What chance can mar the pearl and gold
Thy love hath left in trust with me?
And while in life's late afternoon,
Where cool and long the shadows grow,
I walk to meet the night that soon
Shall shape and shadow overflow,

I cannot feel that thou art far,
Since near at need the angels are;
And when the sunset gates unbar,
Shall I not see thee waiting stand,
And, white against the evening star,
The welcome of thy beckoning hand?

Brisk wielder of the birch and rule,
The master of the district school
Held at the fire his favored place,
Its warm glow lit a laughing face
Fresh-hued and fair, where scarce appeared
The uncertain prophecy of beard.
He teased the mitten-blinded cat,
Played cross-pins on my uncle's hat,
Sang songs, and told us what befalls
In classic Dartmouth's college halls.
Born the wild Northern hills among,
From whence his yeoman father wrung
By patient toil subsistence scant,
Not competence and yet not want,
He early gained the power to pay
His cheerful, self-reliant way;
Could doff at ease his scholar's gown
To peddle wares from town to town;
Or through the long vacation's reach
In lonely lowland districts teach,
Where all the droll experience found
At stranger hearths in boarding round,
The moonlit skater's keen delight,
The sleigh-drive through the frosty night,

The rustic party, with its rough
Accompaniment of blind-man's buff,
And whirling plate, and forfeits paid,
His winter task a pastime made.
Happy the snow-locked homes wherein
He tuned his merry violin,
Or played the athlete in the barn,
Or held the good dame's winding yarn,
Or mirth-provoking versions told
Of classic legends rare and old,
Wherein the scenes of Greece and Rome
Had all the commonplace of home,
And little seemed at best the odds
'Twixt Yankee pedlers and old gods;
Where Pindus-born Arachthus took
The guise of any grist-mill brook,
And dread Olympus at his will
Became a huckleberry hill.
A careless boy that night he seemed;
  But at his desk he had the look
And air of one who wisely schemed,
  And hostage from the future took
  In trainèd thought and lore of book.
Large-brained, clear-eyed—of such as he
Shall Freedom's young apostles be,
Who, following in War's bloody trail,
Shall every lingering wrong assail;
  All chains from limb and spirit strike,
  Uplift the black and white alike;
Scatter before their swift advance
The darkness and the ignorance,

The pride, the lust, the squalid sloth,
Which nurtured treason's monstrous growth,
Made murder pastime, and the hell
Of prison-torture possible;
The cruel lie of caste refute,
Old forms remould, and substitute
For slavery's lash the freeman's will,
For blind routine, wise-handed skill;
A school-house plant on every hill,
Stretching in radiate nerve-lines thence
The quick wires of intelligence;
Till North and South together brought
Shall own the same electric thought,
In peace a common flag salute,
And, side by side in labor's free
And unresentful rivalry,
Harvest the fields wherein they fought.

Another guest that winter night
Flashed back from lustrous eyes the light.
Unmarked by time, and yet not young,
The honeyed music of her tongue
And words of meekness scarcely told
A nature passionate and bold,
Strong, self-concentred, spurning guide,
Its milder features dwarfed beside
Her unbent will's majestic pride.
She sat among us, at the best,
A not unfeared, half-welcome guest,
Rebuking with her cultured phrase
Our homeliness of words and ways.

A certain pard-like, treacherous grace
Swayed the lithe limbs and drooped the lash,
Lent the white teeth their dazzling flash;
And under low brows, black with night,
Rayed out at times a dangerous light;
The sharp heat-lightnings of her face
Presaging ill to him whom Fate
Condemned to share her love or hate.
A woman tropical, intense
In thought and act, in soul and sense,
She blended in a like degree
The vixen and the devotee,
Revealing with each freak or feint
The temper of Petruchio's Kate,
The raptures of Siena's saint.
Her tapering hand and rounded wrist
Had facile power to form a fist;
The warm, dark languish of her eyes
Was never safe from wrath's surprise.
Brows saintly calm and lips devout
Knew every change of scowl and pout;
And the sweet voice had notes more high
And shrill for social battle-cry.
Since then what old cathedral town
Has missed her pilgrim staff and gown,
What convent-gate has held its lock
Against the challenge of her knock!
Through Smyrna's plague-hushed thoroughfares,
Up sea-set Malta's rocky stairs,
Gray olive slopes of hills that hem

Thy tombs and shrines, Jerusalem,
Or startling on her desert throne
The crazy Queen of Lebanon
With claims fantastic as her own,
Her tireless feet have held their way;
And still, unrestful, bowed, and gray,
She watches under Eastern skies,
  With hope each day renewed and fresh,
  The Lord's quick coming in the flesh,
Whereof she dreams and prophesies!
Where'er her troubled path may be,
  The Lord's sweet pity with her go!
The outward wayward life we see,
  The hidden springs we may not know.
Nor is it given us to discern
  What threads the fatal sisters spun
  Through what ancestral years has run
The sorrow with the woman born,
What forged her cruel chain of moods,
What set her feet in solitudes,
  And held the love within her mute,
What mingled madness in the blood,
  A life-long discord and annoy,
  Water of tears with oil of joy,
And hid within the folded bud
  Perversities of flower and fruit.
It is not ours to separate
The tangled skein of will and fate,
To show what metes and bounds should stand
Upon the soul's debatable land,
And between choice and Providence

Divide the circle of events;
But He who knows our frame is just,
Merciful and compassionate,
And full of sweet assurances
And hope for all the language is,
That He remembereth we are dust!

At last the great logs, crumbling low,
Sent out a dull and duller glow,
The bull's-eye watch that hung in view,
Ticking its weary circuit through,
Pointed with mutely-warning sign
Its black hand to the hour of nine.
That sign the pleasant circle broke:
My uncle ceased his pipe to smoke,
Knocked from its bowl the refuse gray
And laid it tenderly away,
Then roused himself to safely cover
The dull red brands with ashes over.
And while, with care, our mother laid
The work aside, her steps she stayed
One moment, seeking to express
Her grateful sense of happiness
For food and shelter, warmth and health,
And love's contentment more than wealth,
With simple wishes (not the weak,
Vain prayers which no fulfilment seek,
But such as warm the generous heart,
O'er-prompt to do with Heaven its part)
That none might lack, that bitter night,
For bread and clothing, warmth and light.

Within our beds awhile we heard
The wind that round the gables roared,
With now and then a ruder shock,
Which made our very bedsteads rock.
We heard the loosened clapboards tost,
The board-nails snapping in the frost;
And on us, through the unplastered wall,
Felt the light sifted snow-flakes fall.
But sleep stole on, as sleep will do
When hearts are light and life is new;
Faint and more faint the murmurs grew,
Till in the summer-land of dreams
They softened to the sound of streams,
Low stir of leaves, and dip of oars,
And lapsing waves on quiet shores.

Next morn we wakened with the shout
Of merry voices high and clear;
And saw the teamsters drawing near
To break the drifted highways out.
Down the long hillside treading slow
We saw the half-buried oxen go,
Shaking the snow from heads uptost,
Their straining nostrils white with frost.
Before our door the straggling train
Drew up, an added team to gain.
The elders threshed their hands a-cold,
  Passed, with the cider-mug, their jokes
  From lip to lip; the younger folks
Down the loose snow-banks, wrestling, rolled.
Then toiled again the cavalcade

O'er windy hill, through clogged ravine,
And woodland paths that wound between
Low drooping pine-boughs winter-weighed.
From every barn a team afoot,
At every house a new recruit,
Where, drawn by Nature's subtlest law,
Haply the watchful young men saw
Sweet doorway pictures of the curls
And curious eyes of merry girls,
Lifting their hands in mock defence
Against the snow-balls' compliments,
And reading in each missive tost
The charm which Eden never lost.

We heard once more the sleigh-bells' sound;
And, following where the teamsters led,
The wise old Doctor went his round,
Just pausing at our door to say,
In the brief autocratic way
Of one who, prompt at Duty's call,
Was free to urge her claim on all,
That some poor neighbor sick abed
At night our mother's aid would need.
For, one in generous thought and deed,
What mattered in the sufferer's sight
The Quaker matron's inward light,
The Doctor's mail of Calvin's creed?
All hearts confess the saints elect
Who, twain in faith, in love agree,
And melt not in an acid sect
The Christian pearl of charity!

So days went on: a week had passed
Since the great world was heard from last.
The Almanac we studied o'er,
Read and reread our little store
Of books and pamphlets, scarce a score;
One harmless novel, mostly hid
From younger eyes, a book forbid,
And poetry (or good or bad,
A single book was all we had),
Where Ellwood's meek, drab-skirted Muse,
A stranger to the heathen Nine,
Sang, with a somewhat nasal whine,
The wars of David and the Jews.
At last the floundering carrier bore
The village paper to our door.
Lo! broadening outward as we read,
To warmer zones the horizon spread;
In panoramic length unrolled
We saw the marvel that it told.
Before us passed the painted Creeks,
And daft M'Gregor on his raids
In Costa Rica's everglades.
And up Taygetos winding slow
Rode Ypsilanti's Mainote Greeks,
A Turk's head at each saddle bow!
Welcome to us its week-old news,
Its corner for the rustic Muse,
Its monthly gauge of snow and rain,
Its record, mingling in a breath
The wedding bell and dirge of death:
Jest, anecdote, and love-lorn tale,

The latest culprit sent to jail;
Its hue and cry of stolen and lost,
Its vendue sales and goods at cost,
  And traffic calling loud for gain.
We felt the stir of hall and street,
The pulse of life that round us beat,
The chill embargo of the snow
Was melted in the genial glow;
Wide swung again our ice-locked door,
And all the world was ours once more!

Clasp, Angel of the backward look
  And folded wings of ashen gray
  And voice of echoes far away,
The brazen covers of thy book;
The weird palimpsest old and vast,
Wherein thou hid'st the spectral past;
Where, closely mingling, pale and glow
The characters of joy and woe;
The monographs of outlived years,
Or smile-illumed or dim with tears,
  Green hills of life that slope to death,
And haunts of home, whose vistaed trees
Shade off to mournful cypresses
  With the white amaranths underneath.
Even while I look, I can but heed
  The restless sands' incessant fall,
Importunate hours that hours succeed,
Each clamorous with its own sharp need,
  And duty keeping pace with all.
Shut down and clasp the heavy lids;

I hear again the voice that bids
The dreamer leave his dream midway
For larger hopes and graver fears:
Life greatens in these later years,
The century's aloe flowers to-day!

Yet, haply, in some lull of life,
Some Truce of God which breaks its strife,
The worldling's eyes shall gather dew,
  Dreaming in throngful city ways
Of winter joys his boyhood knew;
And dear and early friends—the few
Who yet remain—shall pause to view
  These Flemish pictures of old days;
Sit with me by the homestead hearth,
And stretch the hands of memory forth
  To warm them at the wood-fire's blaze!
And thanks untraced to lips unknown
Shall greet me like the odors blown
From unseen meadows newly mown,
Or lilies floating in some pond,
Wood-fringed, the wayside gaze beyond;
The traveller owns the grateful sense
Of sweetness near, he knows not whence,
And, pausing, takes with forehead bare
The benediction of the air.

TIME OUTLINE

Day 1, lines 1–30.
Evening of Day 1, dusk till bed-time, lines 31–40.
Night 1, line 41.
Day 2, lines 42–46.
Night 2, between lines 46–47.
Day 3, lines 47–115.
Evening of Day 3, lines 116–628.
Day 4, lines 629–673.
Days 5, 6, 7, lines 674–714.
Conclusion, lines 715–759.

The storm begins at dusk on the evening of Day 1; it snows all the evening, all night (Night 1); continues through the next day (Day 2), and ceases some time during the following night (Night 2).

INTERPRETATION

As you open the book to begin your study of "Snow-Bound," you notice that the poem itself is preceded by a title, a sub-title, a dedication, and two quotations. Each one of these is put there by the poet himself and is intended to tell us something about the poem to make us understand and enjoy it better.

The title.—The word "Snow-Bound" was not found by the author in the dictionary, but was made up by him for his own use. Its expanded meaning might read, "An Account of Our Being Snow-Bound." If the poem is to be such an account, it should tell who were snow-bound, when, where, and how long, how they came to be snow-bound, how they felt about it, what they did during the time, and how they were finally released. All this the poem does. In fact, the above is a pretty good outline of the snow-bound story.

The sub-title.—A Winter Idyl. A poem which is an idyl is a short story-telling poem dealing with country life and country people. By calling the poem a winter idyl Whittier means to tell us that it is to be a short story of country life in winter.

The dedication.—It is customary for authors, when having a book published, to dedicate it to someone whom they wish to honor. This is usually done by making a statement something like the one Whittier makes and printing it on a page by itself just after the title-page. Look in several books for a "dedication."

The prose quotation.—Whittier found this sentence in an old book which he owned, entitled *Three Books of*

Occult Philosophy. It was written by a man who was born in Prussia six years before America was discovered. A copy was owned by a sort of fortune-teller or wizard who lived near Whittier's mother's home when she was a little girl. She often told the children of how she had once been allowed to visit the wizard and take a peep at this book. It was probably for this reason that Whittier bought it. The quotation shows how the people of that time believed in spirits, but of course Whittier selected it because it says that the light of the common wood fire, as well as sunlight, drives away bad spirits and makes good ones stronger.

The second quotation.—Emerson wrote his poem "The Snow Storm" twenty-four years before Whittier wrote "Snow-Bound." This is the first stanza of Emerson's poem, chosen, of course, because it gives, in a few lines, an exact outline of what Whittier means to describe.

Outward form.—"Snow-Bound" consists of 759 lines, divided, as usually printed, into about twenty-six stanzas. The stanzas are of unequal length, because each one contains and completes a unit of narration, description, or reflection.

Meter.—A line of poetry is a group of poetic feet. A poetic foot is a group of syllables, one of which is accented. This poem is made up of tetrameter lines. "Tetra" means four, and "meter" means measure. There are four groups of syllables in each of these lines, and that is why the lines are called tetrameters. The foot is composed of two syllables, accented on the second. Such a foot is said to be iambic. Since each line consists of four of these iambic measures the meter of the poem is iambic tetrameter.

Preliminary.—We are now to go back in time nearly a hundred years, and, in imagination, live a week

through with this New England Quaker family in their, to us, old-fashioned farm home. We must see the big, two-and-a-half-story farmhouse with its five fire-places, many rooms, and large kitchen at the back where most of the family life went on—must see the busy family, quick-witted, clear-brained, keenly interested in life. We must see their Quaker garb and hear the "thee" and "thou" of their ready Quaker speech, for they were all good talkers. Above all we must see, moving among them, the thin, tall boy with the wonderful eyes who has developing in him, unknown to them all, the brain and heart of a genius. They are a little colony by themselves, living independently on their farm in the midst of the closely crowding woods and hills, with not another house in sight. On the morning of the day we enter the family, the three elder children, Mary, Greenleaf, and Franklin, doubtless, according to their custom, help with the work in the morning, and then, with their dinner pail go off up the north road to school. We may think the teacher is with them, as he seems to have been boarding at the Whittiers when the storm struck. There was no snow on the ground, and the brook was not yet frozen over.

Stanza 1.—This stanza gives the signs of the coming storm that they noticed all day. There is a gradual thickening of the atmosphere shown by the appearance of the sun. In the morning it is dull, at noon it is darkly circled and duller still, and all the afternoon until it disappears it seems to the imagination of the poet to be writing on the sky threatening prophecies of coming storm. There is a penetrating chill in the air, the wind blows from the east, and they can hear and feel the beating of the waves of the Atlantic across which the storm is coming.

Stanza 2.—We can imagine the children hurrying home from school to help get ready for the night. First, came the big house chore of getting in the wood for those fireplaces, and what a pile it must have taken! Then, across the road to the barn they go, where they feed and bed down the cows, meantime hearing the familiar barn sounds, the whinny of the horse, the clashing of the horns and rattling of bows of the impatient cattle, and the fretful scolding of the cock gone early to roost and not wanting to be disturbed.

Stanza 3.—This stanza covers in time the whole evening, from dusk till bed-time. The chores are done and the boys seem on their way to the house, taking their last look at the weather outside. The long-threatened storm begins. Whittier seems trying, in the last eight lines of the stanza, to make us realize how hard it storms. It makes the night white, it is blinding, the flakes swarm, whirl, dance, waver, cross, and recross, as if on wings. And soon the window frame is drifted high, and tall ghosts are looking in at them from where the clothes-line posts had stood.

Stanza 4.—In the same way that it had begun the storm roared on all night. The next morning not even a cheerless sun was to be seen, and it snowed steadily on all day and was still snowing when they went to bed at night. But some time in the night it stopped, so the famous storm lasted a little more than twenty-four hours. Whittier gives only fourteen lines to its description, not nearly so much as he gives to the preparation for it or to its effects. But its purpose in the poem after all is only to serve as a means of bringing the family together around the fire so that we may be made acquainted with them. The next morning was a shining one. The children seem to rush to the windows and out of doors

to see their new world. In the next few lines Whittier seems trying to make us see how strange it all looks to them. It was a world unknown, there was nothing in sight that belonged to them, the earth was a glistening wonder which the sky itself bent down to see—only two things were left in the universe, blue sky and white snow. They hurry to look where their belongings used to be—pig-sty, corn-crib, wall, and wood; but only strange domes and towers are there. The brush-pile is a mound, the road a fenceless drift, the bridle-post wears coat and hat, the well has a Chinese roof, and the slanting sweep, with its load of wind-driven snow, reminds them of the leaning tower of Pisa.

Stanza 5.—While the children are still admiring and exclaiming, the father thinks of the hungry animals in the barn and sounds forth the joyful order, "Boys, a path." Hustling on mittens, high boots, and low-drawn caps they start out, eager for the fray. From the kitchen door they shovel, through the yard, across the road, on to the barn, making a tunnel in the deepest place and naming it Aladdin's Cave. They are still full of vim and fun when they reach the barn, and imagine the animals are prisoners waiting to be released.

Stanza 6.—The chores at the barn are done, the boys are back in the house with the rest of the family. The poet tries hard in this stanza to make us see how entirely cut off they are from all the rest of humanity, and how, as the long, lonesome day wears on, the solitude becomes uncanny and oppressive. The wind which, during the storm, came from the east, now comes from the north—it blows and drifts all day and the air is full of snow though the sky is clear. They begin to notice and be oppressed by the absence of human sounds. Sometimes they can hear the two church bells from the village

of Haverhill, three miles away, but on this day they are still. Sometimes they can see smoke rising through the woods from some neighbor's house, though the house itself cannot be seen; but today not even this sign of life is visible. The air itself is savage, the solitude is intense. Presently the sound of the wind begins to seem like the shrieking of a mindless idiot, the noise of the swaying tree-boughs is the moaning of blind things, feeling their stumbling way, the drift of the sleet against the windows is the beating, ceaseless tapping of the finger-tips of ghosts. All the world except the little space around their hearth seems under a spell. One sound from outside of human labor or laughter would make things seem natural again, but it does not come. Often, too, through the day, they mind, as one notices the sudden stopping of a clock, that the familiar, almost human, music of their brook is hushed, that even the sharpest ear cannot hear it.

Stanza 7.—Whittier is going to show us now that the old, old writer from whom he quotes at the opening of his poem spake truly when he said that as the celestial sunshine drives away dark spirits, so also a Fire of Wood doth the same. The day wore on toward night. As the sun disappeared behind the blustering tops of the high western hills, the making of the big evening fire began. The kitchen fireplace, we remember, was eight feet wide. A huge, thick, green, oak log was rolled in and put in place at the back of the fireplace, on its top was put another almost as huge. A "knotty forestick," probably also green, was put on the andirons as far as possible to the front. The space between them was filled with kindling, brush, and smaller wood, and the fire lighted underneath. Think of the interest of it all to the children as compared with having father make

a furnace fire in the basement! They hovered near for the sake of both the warmth and the spectacle. The red blaze appeared, the white smoke curled up, the cheerful crackling began, the walls and beams began to gleam in the firelight, the whole big room burst into rosy bloom. They ran to the window, probably one of the north ones opposite the fireplace, to see the miracle of the exact reproduction, by reflection, of their own fire—crane, trammels, and andirons with their Turk's-head tops all showing as plainly as in the fireplace inside, and they whispered to each other as they watched it an old rhyme about the witches.

Stanza 8.—The poet here seems determined to make us realize once more what a world and what a night it is outside before allowing us to settle down with the family about the fire and enjoy it. We go with the children to the eastern window or door of the big kitchen and take one long, final look outside. Above the woods to the east shines the full moon, the transfigured hills beneath it stretch away, dead white, save for an occasional shadowy ravine or a patch of dark hemlock; the snow is still drifting and flashing—the white light of the moon seems to suit the coldness and make it visible. Beautiful as it is we are ready to go back to the fire and be "shut in from all the world without."

Stanza 9.—Now, in contrast, we have a picture of the concentrated essence of comfort. The hearth is clean-winged. Someone, probably Mary, has taken the turkey wing hanging near by for the purpose and brushed all the litter into the all-devouring fire. The logs are by this time red with heat, and it only adds to their joy to hear the wind, roaring like an animal outside, leaping against door and window, only to fall back in baffled rage; for, whenever he comes with a greater fury that

fairly shakes the big old beams and rafters, the chimney only roars back and laughs the louder. The dog stretches his head to the fire, the cat is near by, the cider is warming, the apples are roasting, and the nuts stand in their basket ready to be cracked. Can you imagine whether the children are happy or not?

Stanza 10.—Here Whittier tries to show how the uncanny, weird solitude has been conquered, the sociability and comfort and "common wood fire" have indeed driven away the dark spirits. It may be cold and gaunt outside, the north wind may rave—as long as their fire burns they are not afraid, they know which will conquer. But just at this climax of the triumph of the home comfort over the solitude, the man who has been living over the scenes of his boyhood, dwelling in memory on them and writing of them so vividly is overcome.

Whittier was, as we have seen, living at Amesbury, nine miles from the farm, when he wrote the poem. Years had passed since he, with his little brother Franklin, made the path to the barn, helped build the big fires, and sat with the family on such evenings as he describes. Father, mother, uncle, aunt, and sisters are gone, the farm itself has been sold and is occupied by strangers. We can almost hear the sobs and see the falling tears through the remainder of the stanza. He suddenly realizes his loneliness, his age, and how strange it is that he should be living on when the rest are gone. He remembers his brother, who, though living, is far away, and speaks to him in spirit. It comes home to him anew that the voices of that circle are still, the faces that were lighted by that fire can be seen no more. His thought is that his brother and himself may walk in the very paths their loved ones' feet helped to make, sit beneath

the same trees, and hear, as they did, the hum of bees and the rustling of corn. Here are their books, even their written words remaining; but they themselves have vanished. Yet his love for them makes him dream, and his faith in God makes him trust that he shall, nevertheless, somewhere see them again. This belief gives him so much comfort that he thinks with pity of those who bury their dead with no expectation of seeing them again, who have never learned that Life is larger and stronger than Death, and that the loved ones can never really be lost.

Stanza 11.—Here we go suddenly back to the story and to the doings of the family around the fire. They told old stories, worked out puzzles, told riddles, and spoke pieces found in their school readers. Greenleaf himself seems to have recited a poem which was a strong argument against slavery, and to have remembered the lines many times afterward in his long labors for the freedom of the slaves.

Then, oh joy for the boys, their father told them stories of the days when he was young. Such a good talker was he, and so well did he hold their attention, that he seemed to them to really be doing all these wonderful things again. He had formerly taken many trading trips into Canada, delivering articles useful and necessary to people there in exchange for game, furs, etc. He tells them now about his rides through the woods along the shores of Lake Memphremagog, of eating moose with the trappers, and samp with the Indians. He tells of a trip to the Canadian French settlement at St. François, and of how, on moonlight nights, the whole village gathered for out-of-door dancing under the trees, the gay violin leading, and even the grandmothers taking part along with the girls. He tells them

of how he had joined merry haying parties of young men who, with their scythes, had cut the grass on Salisbury's level, mile-wide marshes near their home. He tells them about going fishing. The boys seemed almost to go with him as he talked—up the shore to Boar's Head (see map), and fishing there, off shore, or venturing farther out near the "rocky Isles of Shoals." He tells of their keen hunger, of the freshly caught fish broiled over drift-wood fires, of the steaming chowder eaten with clam-shell spoons; of how, sometimes, when there was breeze enough to sail the boat along so that nobody had to row, the oarsmen lay on the marsh hay in the bottom of the boat while marvelous tales were told, sometimes of dreams, sometimes of signs that had come true. Some of their very stories their father remembers and tells to the boys.

Stanza 12.—When it comes the mother's turn to entertain the company, she never for a minute lets her busy fingers rest, but works as she talks, whirling her little wheel as she spins the flax, or darning more yarn into the heels of newly knit stockings to make them wear better. When she was a little girl she had lived in a little town called Cocheco, up in New Hampshire, near the mouth of the Piscataqua River, so she tells them first a story handed down from her grandfather's time, one they had doubtless often heard, of a midnight attack by Indians from which her great-uncle carried a scalp-mark all his life. When Whittier tries to tell us of the beauty of his mother's language, he says, "Her phrases were fitting and suitable, her speech was rich, it was picturesque, it was free—it was unrhymed poetry, the poetry of simple life and country ways." In this beautiful language she relates to them stories of her life when a little girl. She describes her early home so that they

seem to be visiting her there; tells of the old fireplaces and the family circles around them in such a way that these circles seem to open for the children to enter. She tells how she was one day allowed to visit the old wizard and take a frightened peep into his conjuring book, which was so famous that everybody in that part of the country had heard about it. (Do you wonder that Greenleaf afterward went and bought the book?) She tells how she remembers hearing the night hawks at twilight, the boat-horns on the river, and the loon's weird laughter far down by the marshes. She, too, like them, had lived near a little trout brook, and she tells them how she had succeeded or failed in fishing, what kind of flowers grew in her woods and meadows, of how she had gathered nuts in autumn, seen flocks of black wild ducks on the river, and heard the cries of the wild geese flying overhead in November. Then, with graver look and more serious tone, she tells them stories from some of their Quaker books. From a History of the Quakers, she gave them accounts of certain brave men and women among them, who, rather than give up their faith, had suffered death by fire. From another book, a journal or diary kept by a saintly and gentle old Quaker sea captain, she told them this story of faith rewarded. The captain and his crew were far out at sea, and the wind had failed. Day after day there was not a breath to move the sails. At last food and water gave out, and the crew, half-crazed with hunger, followed the portly form of the captain with their eyes and muttered hints of casting lots to see whether he should live or die. He understood, and told them they need cast no lots, that unless God sent them food he would willingly give himself to be eaten in order to save their lives. Suddenly, as he said the words, the water rippled, and a school of

porpoise flashed into view. The captain told them to take and eat, for the fish were sent to save his life by the same God who sent the ram to save Isaac when he was about to be offered as a sacrifice by his father, Abraham.

Stanza 13.—In this stanza the poet seems determined to make us see that this much-loved uncle was the most satisfactory and delightful companion that two boys ever were blessed with. In stanza 11 he made no comment on his father, and in stanza 12 gave only a few words on his mother's gift of speech, but he devotes half this stanza to loving and respectful talk about his uncle. After telling us that he was "innocent of books," he hastens to tell us that he was rich in the learning gained from fields and brooks, the teachers that have been giving mankind lessons from the beginning of time in Nature's great out-of-door school. He tells us that his uncle was full of wisdom concerning the moon, the tides, and the weather, could tell whether they were to have storms or fair weather—whether the coming seasons were to be warm or cold, wet or dry. The boys perceived that their uncle knew all this because he could read in Nature little hints and signs that other people never saw, and that in the same way he gained his knowledge of everything that grew or lived in the woods, and understood the language of the animals and birds. Whittier honors his uncle by comparing him to two wise philosophers of ancient times, and to an English writer of note, Gilbert White, who wrote lovingly of his own neighborhood. He praises him for being content to live where he was born, and for being proud of his own little world. This wonderful Uncle Moses, in his turn, told of shooting wild game birds, gathering eagle's eggs, of feats of rowing or skating, of marvelous things done

in hunting and fishing, till they all forgot the cold weather outside and ceased to hear the bitter wind. It was summer time with them, with corn getting ripe in the fields, pigeons flying, partridges drumming, mink fishing in the thawed-out river; the fields were not dead-white with snow but gay with beans or clover, in which there were woodchucks needing to be hunted, muskrats laying their mud walls, and squirrels gathering hickory nuts for their winter store.

Stanza 14.—Now it is the "dear aunt" whose charms and sweetness we must be made to see. In order to make us understand how he had loved her pleasant smile and voice he says that he still sees and hears them in his dreams. He says that though lonely and homeless, she was loving, unselfish, calm and gracious, and welcome wherever she went—that her very presence seemed to fill the place she was in with the atmosphere of home. She told them stories of the good times of her girlhood, husking-bees, apple-bees, sleigh-rides, and summer sails. The incidents themselves, Whittier tells us, were commonplace, like a homespun warp in a piece of cloth, but she told them with an interest and romance that wove into the fabric a woof-thread of gold. He says she was still genial and full of faith; that life was still beautiful and interesting before her; that she retained, even in maturity, the fresh spirit of youth. And her life he assures us had not been a bed of roses. The years, instead, had been filled with toil and soil and care. By saying that she had kept unprofaned the virgin fancies of her heart, Whittier, no doubt, refers to the fact that she had cherished her loyalty to a lover who died in youth.

Stanza 15.—This stanza he devotes to his sister Mary, and it is well worthy of being committed to mem-

ory as a tribute and a summing-up of character. She was near his own age, was his comrade and intimate friend. She was the first one to know about his poems and never wavered in her faith in his genius. She was the one who, "impulsively" and "promptly" and secretly ushered in his literary career by sending one of his poems to be published. She had married early and lived near by, and died only four years before the writing of the poem. She sat, he tells us, on this memorable evening, busily at work near the stand, probably because her "task," whatever it was, required the candle light. "A full, rich nature" means a nature complete, lacking nothing, full of sympathy and love and generous emotions. She was, he says, trustful, truthful, so just as to seem almost stern, impulsive, earnest, prompt, quick to think of generous things to do and quick to do them, ready to do unselfish, self-sacrificing things in secret and disguise them by pretending she was making no sacrifice. In the last six lines of the stanza our thoughts are obliged to leave the home fireside where Mary sits working by the stand, and think again of the writer in his now lonely home in Amesbury. He throws the lines into the form of an apostrophe, direct address to her, as if she could hear and understand. The exclamation points are put there to show his strong emotions of love and grief. These six lines are almost a review of her life. There had been, he thinks, things to bear that had sorely tried her heart. There had been hard work and toil, some bitter thoughts and things. From all these he rejoices that she now has rest, also that she lived so loving and generous a life that the blessings of many followed her to the grave.

Stanza 16.—This stanza is the climax of his personal

tributes to the members of his family, and, after the first six lines, is rather an expression of the grief and hopes of the lonely writer than a description of the scenes around the fireside. Preparatory to understanding it we should remember that he thinks of the little Elizabeth at the snow-bound time as about five years old, that she possessed the wonderful eyes which both she and Greenleaf inherited from their mother; that throughout his life she had been the close household companion of her brother; and that he is writing the poem less than a year after her death. Sitting among them that evening as a sort of central figure, he says, she considered herself a part of everything that went on, feeling sure from loving experience that they all wanted her to see and hear and enjoy everything. Whittier dearly loved the warmth and greenness of summer, almost above all things else he loved peace. A continual summer with "fadeless green," and a holy peace enter into his ideas of Paradise. He remembers the childish beauty of her large, dark eyes and rejoices to believe those eyes are now shining with the summer beauty and peace of Paradise. The emotion of the remainder of the stanza cannot be given in prose, but the thread of the thought is as follows: He thinks of her as in heaven, and in some place of especial beauty as on some heavenly hill, in the shade of saintly palms, or near a silvery river's strand, and wonders if she sees him and knows what he is doing. Only a little year ago, he thinks, she was here with me (she died the previous September and he is writing the poem the next June), but the snow has for months lain on her grave. Now the summer is here again, warm winds are blowing and flowers are blooming. I walk the very paths through which we, only last summer, walked together, see the flowers she loved, and the

sod whereon she rested. The birds are just as glad as last year, the brier-rose just as sweet, the hills just as green under June's blue sky. Yet I look and listen for something which does not come, and feel a loss in song of bird and bloom of flower. (Now for the last sixteen lines he takes the apostrophe form again.) And yet, he says, am I not really richer than when she was here, for I have now the pearl and gold of these beautiful memories which nothing can change. And as I go through the remainder of my journey of life, coming each day nearer to death, I shall feel each day that she is near me. And when the gates of death swing open for me I shall see her beckoning and waiting for me.

Stanza 17.—Every school teacher in those days was a "brisk wielder of the birch and rule," so Whittier means no disrespect by so introducing this well-loved guest who occupies by the fire a favored place. He tells us this about the teacher. He is young, healthy, full of fun, and does not carry school worries home with him. His overflowing energy keeps him continually busy. The cat's tiger-like shadow he disturbs by putting a mitten over its head and teasing it. He uses the top of Uncle Moses' hat for a game, sings songs, and, most interesting of all, tells of his college life. Whittier thinks it worth while to give an account of his life, hoping, no doubt, to stimulate other country boys to get busy and make something of themselves too. The "wild northern hills" where he was born must have been truly wild back in those early days. His father was a farmer, and their circumstances were much like those of the Whittiers. By hard, steady work they managed to earn a living; they were never in want though far from rich. He early learned two of the most important things any boy or girl can learn—to

pay his own way and do it cheerfully, and to adapt himself to circumstances. If he could not get one thing to do he did another. He could take off his "gown," which all men students then wore (there were no women students in those days), and peddle, or he could teach school. When teaching he was the right kind of "mixer." He boarded round, got acquainted with the people, and found the experience droll and interesting. He skated by moonlight, took sleigh-rides, went to the young people's parties, and took part in their games. In the homes he made himself useful and easy to entertain. He had a violin and played it (perhaps not in the Whittier home), jumped and turned somersaults with the boys in the barn, politely held the skein of yarn for the mother's winding. Students at college in that day spent almost all their time on Greek, Latin, and mathematics. This brilliant young fellow evidently had the famous stories of Greek and Latin literature at his tongue's end, and gave laughable accounts, perhaps of Caesar's wars and marches, or of the famous siege of Troy. He spoke so familiarly of the scenes of Greece and Rome that they seemed not far away and ancient, but familiar and near home. He talked of the Greek gods just as he might speak of a Yankee peddler, of the classic rivers as of a New England brook, and even of "dread Olympus," the home of the gods, as he might speak of a huckleberry hill.

Stanza 18.—Here Whittier shows us how greatly he admired and was influenced by this energetic young teacher. He was off duty that night, the poet says, and seemed like a careless boy, but when at his desk for study his whole manner changed. Then he looked and acted like one trying to train himself to think, and get learning from books, in order that he might compel the

future into which he was going to treat him kindly, to give him a chance to earn a living, and an honorable work to do. Whittier says that the country, at the time he is writing, needs many such young men as this teacher was back in those days of the storm. The war had closed, the Union had been saved, and the slaves freed, but many wrongs remained. Young men like this teacher, he says, are needed to assail these wrongs, to free the spirits of those whose bodies had been freed; to uplift all the people, black and white, and free them from the ignorance, pride, lust, and sloth that had made treason and all the horrors of war possible. They are needed, he thinks, to teach that "caste" is a lie, to change old customs, to help make the newly freed slaves think and act and work like free men; to increase education and intelligence until North and South shall, on great questions, think and feel alike, honor the same flag, work together without rivalry, and harvest grain together in the very fields where once they fought.

Stanza 19.—I have read that Whittier labored hard on this sketch and considered it one of the best pieces of writing in the poem. What an observer the young poet must have been, and what an impression this strange woman, their "half-welcome guest," must have made on him that he should be able, after so many years, to write such a living reproduction. We are asked to notice her lustrous, flashing eyes, that she is not young but still shows no signs of age, that her voice is sweet and her words so meek as almost to conceal her bold, passionate, strong, self-centered, independent nature, with will-power towering high over all. We are told that though she was there as a guest they were almost afraid of her, could only half feel that she was welcome. Her speech and manner, he says, were those of the

educated and fashionable, and made them feel that their own ways and words were homely and plain. We are made to see that though she is slender and graceful, yet her grace is cat-like and treacherous, that this is seen in the movements of her limbs, the droop of her eyelash, the gleam of her white teeth, and the flash of her eyes under their low black brows, while her quick changes of color betray a temper that bodes no good to him who shall be "condemned to share her love or hate." We see with the poet that whatever she thought or felt she thought and felt intensely, that there was no moderation for her, that she disagreed like a vixen, and worshiped like a saint, that though her hand and wrist looked soft and beautiful, it might suddenly become a fist; that her warm, languishing eyes might suddenly blaze in wrath, and her sweet voice become shrill in argument. Since that night, he says, she has wandered far—visited old cathedral towns, convents, Smyrna in time of a plague, Jerusalem and its surrounding shrines and tombs; has journeyed on to Lebanon, and sojourned with its queen; and today (while he is writing) she is in the Far East, converted to a new faith, and watching daily for the second coming of Christ. But the kindly poet warns himself and us that we must not judge harshly, because we know so little of the causes of it all. We see the outside only, he says, but know not how much is due to fate, how much was inherited from her ancestry, what causes made her different from others, and mingled the madness, discord, tears, and perversities in her cup of life. It is not our business to measure and set bounds, saying she should have done this or should not have done that; but there is hope for us all, he says, in the fact that He who is our judge remembereth always that we are dust.

Stanza 20.—The great evening is over. The huge green logs have burned out and are crumbling, the watch hand points to nine. Uncle Moses lays his pipe away and covers up the fire; the mother carefully folds away her work and lingers to offer gratitude for shelter and a prayer that none may suffer on this bitter night.

Stanza 21.—The boys go to their cold room and with the wind fairly rocking their bedsteads and the snow sifting through the cracks across the bed, they sink into delicious slumber.

Stanza 22.—Now begins the fourth day of the poem story. The boys are wakened by hearing shouts and fun outside. The "welcome sounds of toil and mirth" they had longed for in vain the day before have come at last! They look out and see teams coming, men shoveling, and oxen wallowing through the snow. The procession stops in front of their house to get a new team. Everybody is liking the fun, cider is passed, jokes are cracked, and the youngsters, to keep warm, wrestle and roll down the snow banks. Then teams and men travel on, up the windy hill, through the deep ravine, and around through the woods, where pine trees, their branches loaded with snow, stand close to the road. At every barn they get a new team, at each house a new man, and at every place where pretty girls look out the boys "compliment" them with snow-balls.

Stanza 23.—Sleigh-bells, and the doctor's rig stopping at their door! His message was brief—a sick neighbor would need Mrs. Whittier that night. He spoke with authority, because he did his own duty and expected others to do theirs. It would make no difference to the sufferer who was relieved, the poet says, that one of the persons giving help was a Quaker and the other a Presbyterian. Everybody recognizes, he thinks, the

goodness of those who do deeds of kindness for the sake of humanity, and do not withhold their help because of difference of sect.

Stanza 24.—The little world of their immediate neighborhood is partly opened up to them now, but they are still kept pretty closely to the house. So the days pass. They study the almanac, read again and again their little stock of books and pamphlets, their one novel, their one long Quaker poem. At last, delayed a week, to their joy they see the carrier floundering through the snow with the village newspaper. Wonderful is the effect. We have seen with what understanding and attention Whittier observed humanity. Now we see that he reads in the same way. For him, to read was to re-live. He forgot where he was. The horizon seemed to broaden. He traveled out into warmer climes. The events of which he read reproduced themselves before him. He saw the Creeks down in Florida, M'Gregor in Costa Rica, and (as he might again if he could read the papers now), saw savage scenes in the war in Greece. The Turk's head at the saddle bow of each Greek as he followed Prince Ypsilanti up Mt. Taygetos was quite a different one, too, from those that decorated the andirons of their kitchen fireplace. They read the poem in the corner of the paper, the very corner of the very paper where some of Whittier's own poems soon appeared. They read the record of snowfall and rainfall, the accounts of weddings and funerals, the funny column, the love story, and even the advertisements. They felt that they belonged to and again lived in the big wide world; the imprisoning snow melted, and what all the oxen and all the men could not do, the newspaper, the reading, and the power to use the imagination aright had done.

Stanza 25.—The "Snow-Bound" story is done, but you must not fail to get the thought of the two beautiful closing stanzas. It is memory that has furnished Whittier with all the material for this poem. And now he takes the apostrophe form once more, and talks directly to memory. He thinks of it as an angel looking backward into the past, its gray wings folded, its voice a sound of far-away echoes. It has been holding its great book open for him to read from. He tells it now to close its book, the book in which it hides the stories of the past, some of them sad, and some joyful; stories of lives that have been lived, of homes that have been broken up by death. Even as I look at your book, he says, I know that time is swiftly passing, the hours come one after the other, each bringing a word of command and a duty. So shut down and clasp the lids, for a voice bids me leave this dream of the past for the more important things of the present. Life now is greater than ever before, today is the most important day of the century.

Stanza 26.—Yet, though my poem is a dream of the past, perhaps some busy man of the world, whose boyhood was passed among scenes similar to those I have described, may, in some peaceful moment of life, read the poem and be reminded, with eyes filling with tears, of his own early home. Or perhaps some of the few remaining friends of my boyhood days may read it and live over with me the old days. And these and other unknown readers of my poem may think of me with gratitude. As a wayside traveler who may be greeted by the scent of new-mown hay from an unseen meadow, or by the fragrance of lilies from an unseen pond, is grateful for the sweetness though he knows not whence it comes, so I shall receive, with head bared in reverent gratitude, the thanks of all who read and love my poem.

QUESTIONS

How many and what signs of storm given in stanza 1? Read the eight lines giving the first sign. Give meaning of "waning," "tracing," "ominous," "portent." What figure does Whittier use when he speaks of the sun as writing a threatening prophecy on the sky? Read the six lines giving the second sign. Why should Whittier speak of a suit of home-spun rather than one of any other kind? Read the half-line giving the third sign of the storm; the three and a half lines giving the last sign of storm.

What word in the first line of stanza 2 suggests that the boys had certain chores that they did every night? Study lines 19–20 and make a list of the barn chores the boys seem to have done, giving each the name a farmer would give it now. Meaning of "challenge"? Of "querulous"? Does Whittier mean us to understand that the "querulous challenge" the rooster sent down was a crow? What time did it begin to snow? What word in line 34 shows the force of the storm? In lines 33–36 what expressions show that Whittier is reminded by the snow-flakes of bees? Which word does Whittier make up? In speaking of the flakes as bees he uses what figure of speech? What figure in lines 39–40? Meaning of "hoary"?

Beginning with line 33, read the fourteen lines that cover the entire time of the storm. Which lines describe the storm from dusk till bed-time? From bed-time till morning? From morning till night again? When did it stop snowing? What word in line 41 shows the violence of the storm? Meaning of "spherule"?

"Pellicle"? What three kinds of flakes then did the boys notice? Find the dictionary meaning of "meteor" and see if Whittier has a right to call the snow-flakes meteors.

Beginning with line 46 read the seven lines that sound as if the family were taking in a general view of things before looking for particular things. What beautiful expression does Whittier apply to the snow-covered earth? Of the strange shapes he sees when they begin to look for their familiar sights, which shows most imagination? Which show study of books and pictures?

Judging from the frame of mind in which the boys prepared to make the path, do you think the father gave his command in a cross way? What part of the path making did they enjoy the better for something they had read? Meaning of "supernal"? What shows that they were still having a good time when they reached the barn? Is there any doubt this time as to whether or not the rooster crows? What does Whittier call the flock of hens in line 86? What animal is mentioned in this account of the chores that was not spoken of in the first account? Meaning of "patriarch"? "Sage"? Figure in line 89? Beginning with line 81 read the account of the chores, noticing what each animal is said to do. Could a man who had never done farm work have written the lines? What shows that Whittier thought of the animals as having almost human feelings? Answer: He slightly personifies them. They are in prison, the horse wonders, the cock says a greeting, the oxen reproach them, the ram shakes his wise head and stamps.

How has the wind changed? What word tells us whether or not it was a steady wind? To personify is to think as having life like an animal or a human being.

Whittier personifies the wind, line 94, by speaking of its breath, as if it were something alive. How many and what other things are personified, or spoken of as alive in stanza 6? Meaning of "spell"? Which day of the duration of the poem is this one in which they feel so lonesome? What, in lines 110–115, made them more lonesome? What, in line 117, made the Whittiers in their valley always have an early sunset? Read the six and a half lines that describe the making of the fire, then stand and tell the class just how it was done. How many big sticks did they have, where did they put the biggest one, where each of the others, what did they use for kindling, where did they put the smaller wood, where did they light it? For what two reasons, probably, did they "hover" near? In telling us how the room gradually lighted up what four things tell us about its appearance? Answer by saying, The walls were whitewashed, etc. Meaning of "pendent"? Where does he mean that the crane and hanging trammels showed, inside or outside?

Beginning with line 143 read the twelve lines giving the view from the east window of the white coldness outside. Notice the expression, line 151, "such a world," also, line 155, "all the world." What is there in this picture of the outside world in stanza 8 that makes it seem good to be "shut in" from it all? What then does Whittier gain by putting in stanza 8? As they shut themselves in from this almost terrible world outside and gather about the fire they have the comfort of warmth. What word, line 156, does Whittier make up to show that they also had the comfort of order and cleanliness? From what direction is the wind still blowing? In speaking of the wind as roaring in baffled rage is he personifying it as a man or an animal? How

have the logs changed in color since we last saw them? What does he mean by the frost-line? What, lines 161–162, shows the great force of the wind? What figure used in lines 162–163? Meaning of "silhouette"? Of "couchant"? Why does the cat's shadow look so large? "Meet," line 169, means suitable, fitting.

Beginning with line 175 read the four lines showing how comfortable and secure they felt. How many exclamation points in the remainder of stanza 10? Who had them put there? Answer: Whittier. For what purpose? Answer: To show the reader his strong emotion. What sudden change in time and place must we imagine between lines 178–179? Answer: We must think of a time about forty-five years later when Whittier has become a middle-aged man, and of his lonely home in Amesbury, about nine miles away from the farm, where he is writing the poem. Do you wonder that the poet, after dwelling in thought so long on the scenes of his early home, is overcome with grief? Read lines 179–211, in which he speaks of his grief and loss. Commit to memory lines 200–211.

In what four ways, lines 112–115, did they entertain themselves? Which amusements helped the children in their use of language and power of expression? Which one greatly influenced Whittier's after life and helped to make him a reformer? Read lines 216–223, which tell the effect on his life of the poem which he committed to memory and recited.

The father tells of three of the occupations of his younger days, of his trips into Canada for purposes of barter, of haying, and of fishing. Read lines 224–235 about the trip into Canada. Which two lines tell of his rides through the big woods along the shores of Lake Memphremagog? Which two tell of his eating with the

Indians and trappers? Read the eight lines telling of his stay among the Canadian French. At what time of year must he have been there if they danced out-of-doors in the moonlight? Read the lines which tell of the haying. What expression, line 236, shows that the father told of the haying so well that the children seemed to be with him while it was being done? The rest of the stanza is about the fishing. Read the lines that tell where they fished (see map). The lines that tell of their eating. What word in these lines does Whittier make up? The lines that tell of their story-telling. What four kinds of stories mentioned? Mention four or five things that made the father's stories a good education for the children.

What two things might the mother be doing while she talked? What shows that she was not knitting? What was her first story about? Was the mother herself in this Indian raid? What is the object of "recalling," line 262, or, what does the mother recall? In what kind of language did she tell the stories after she had recalled them? Where was Mrs. Whittier's childhood home? Give at least one way, line 268, in which her early home was like their own. Read the four lines which tell of her visit to the wizard. What is a wizard? Meaning of "conjure"? Why was she frightened? What three interesting sounds does she remember and tell them of? What is a loon? Study lines 276–283, in which she tells of her out-of-door occupations, and name four of them. In what books had she read the stories she told about the Quakers? Tell the second one. How is the story of Abraham and Isaac referred to in lines 305–306, like the story of the skipper?

Read the four lines, 307–310, by which he introduces his uncle. Meaning of "lore"? What had been his

teachers in the great out-of-door school of nature? Read lines 311–323, which tell the wonderful things he had learned to do. Where in these lines is it shown that it was because he was a close observer that he could foretell the weather and understand the birds and animals? To what two great men does Whittier compare him? Beginning with line 324 read the nine lines that describe his uncle. To what other great man does he here compare his uncle? What did the uncle tell about? What are "prodigies"? Beginning with line 337, read the lines that give the effect on them all of his stories. What a good talker the uncle must have been to make them forget the cold, imagine it was summer and that they were having all these good times!

Read the ten lines which describe the aunt. Make a list of the expressions which describe her. Which one shows that Whittier still remembers her with great love? Read the three lines which tell what she told about. The three lines which tell how she told her stories. Beginning with line 366 read the twelve lines that tell why she was able to make her stories so interesting to the young folks. Why should anyone, lines 376–377, speak of her with scorn? What does Whittier think about it?

Where was Mary Whittier on this evening? Make a list from lines 380–385 of the expressions which describe her. Read the six lines, full of brotherly love, which are addressed directly to her, in which he thinks of her as in heaven. What figure in the last two lines of the stanza?

Read the six lines which describe the little Elizabeth and tell her place in the circle. "Held" in the first line means considered. The next two lines, which tell where he thinks she is. The next four, which ask a question. What is the question? Read lines 404–406, which

speak of her death and of the time since. She died September 3, 1864, the snows of one winter drifted over her grave, and now, in the next June, he is writing the poem in her honor. Why, then, line 405, should he say, "one little year"? Read lines 407–422, telling of what he does now in the beautiful June weather, and of how nothing seems the same to him as before. Read the remainder of the stanza which shows how he comforted himself in his grief. Find the lines in which he speaks of the memories he has of her as of great riches. The lines in which he states his belief that they are not really separated—that she is still near him. The lines in which he states his expectation of seeing her again.

The first six lines of stanza 18 introduce and describe the teacher. Would a teacher now think the first two a compliment? What shows that he does not take school cares home with him? That he is young? What four things does he do? Which one probably interested the company most? Was he a city-bred youth? Find out whether "competence" means just enough or a little too much. Why did he learn to pay his own way? What ways mentioned in which he did it? What is a pastime? What four things said to have made his teaching school a pastime? Was he the kind of teacher young people would like? Why? In line 466 what word does Whittier put in to show that the people where he boarded were glad to have him with them. How did he entertain the whole family? How the boys? How make himself polite and useful? How entertain with what he had learned at college?

What two things, line 484, did he work hard for in order to get ready for the future? From line 485 to the end of the stanza Whittier is talking of the needs of the country at the time he is writing, about forty-five

years after the snow-bound evening, and just after the close of the Civil War. He thinks the country needs many just such young men as this teacher was when he knew him. See if you can study out the seven things he says these young men ought to do for the people, and tell what he means by each one of them.

Whittier arranges what he says about Miss Livermore, the other guest, into four parts. First, he gives lines on her appearance and nature, then on her strange travels since that evening, then on where she is and what she is doing at the time he is writing, then on his pity for her and the reasons she should not be judged harshly. Find where each part begins and ends. From the descriptive lines make a list of all the expressions which tell how she looked; of all the expressions describing her nature. Write a paragraph on each. Give a full account of her travels. Where is she and what is she doing at the time he is writing? Show whether he thinks she is more to be pitied than blamed and why.

For what two reasons does the party break up? What seems to be the uncle's job? For what five things does the mother give thanks? What shows that Whittier thought his mother almost too ready to sacrifice for others?

This to-bed and to-sleep stanza has two parts: first, the account of what they heard and felt of the wild, cold night after they went to bed; second, the account of their going off to sleep. Where does each one begin and end? In the first part what shows how hard the wind is still blowing and how cold it is? Can you read the last part without getting sleepy? Try it, reading slowly and making the voice very soft on the three last lines. What four soft sounds does he mention? Also he selects words that give a succession of smooth, soft

sounds. Notice the long vowel sounds and the words that begin or end with "*s*."

When the next morning comes how long is it since they have heard or seen anyone outside the family? How many days since the story of the poem began? What do they now hear? After rushing to the window what do they see? Read the four lines in which Whittier describes the oxen. What three things make the picture so vivid? The two lines that describe their stopping. While waiting for the Whittiers to get their team what do the men do? The boys? What does Whittier call the line of teams in line 637? In line 643? What word in this line shows that it was hard work for both oxen and men? Of the three places he mentions along which the road went, which was the coldest place to work? Where was the snow deepest? Where was the most easy and pleasant place to work? What word does Whittier make up, line 646, to show that the trees along the road where it went through the woods were loaded down with snow? Why is "Nature" capitalized? Meaning of "subtlest"? Why should the girls who went to the doors to see the procession consider it a compliment to have snow-balls thrown at them? What is a missive?

Later in the day, who is the first one to take advantage of the newly opened roads? Why stop at the Whittiers? In what two things were the Doctor and Mrs. Whittier alike? What was Mrs. Whittier's religious belief? To what church did the doctor belong? If the Quakeress, Mrs. Whittier, and the Presbyterian doctor both went through the snow and cold to relieve a sufferer, how much difference does Whittier think it makes to the sufferer whether they are prompted to do it by Presbyterianism or Quakerism? There are some acids that

will melt and destroy pearls. Whittier thinks of charity as a Christian pearl. What does he think of as the acid that destroys it? What figure of speech is this?

"So days went on," that is, as the day above described went on, weather cold, roads drifted, once in a while a passer-by or a caller. How many such days had to go by to make the time up to a week? By "great world," line 675, Whittier means the world of different countries and places outside of their neighborhood. How did they spend their spare time? Make a list of the books in their library. Who was the author of their one book of poetry? The title is given in the notes but what was its subject? The paper which at last comes is a week old. Why have they not received it sooner? What word, line 687, shows that the roads are still bad? Do they read the paper more or less eagerly and intelligently for having been so solitary? What three accounts of exciting things going on in different parts of the world? Which one in our own country? Which one in Europe? Which two peoples mentioned are now at war and filling the papers with news? From lines 700–708 show that the paper had in it poetry, weather records, accounts of weddings and funerals, a funny column, a love story, advertisements. Read the last six lines of the stanza, which show the effect of the reading on their feelings.

If you were to make a statue representing Hope as an angel, you would probably make it of white, its face to the front, its wings spread for forward flight. Which way does Whittier make his angel of memory look? What the color and position of its wings? The nature of its voice? What bid it do? What call its book in line 719? Meaning of "weird" and of "palimpsest"? Read lines 721–728, which tell what is in this book of his

past. What way does Whittier take to tell us that even while he is still looking into the past he knows that time is rapidly passing? What way of telling that every hour brings something important which it is his duty to do? What way of saying that the present is always more important than the past? What beautiful way of saying that today is always the most important day of the century?

Although his poem is a dream of the past, what effect, lines 740–744, does he hope it may have on some people who have spent their childhood as he did, in the country? What other people, lines 746–750, does he hope may read and love his poem? To what two beautiful things, lines 751–755, does he compare the thanks which may come to him from these and other unknown readers like ourselves? In the last four lines of the poem, how does he say that he, as a wayside traveler, shall receive our thanks?

NOTES

Time of the action of the poem.—It seems impossible definitely to locate the snow-bound year. Mr. Whittier probably has in mind a particular storm, but, wishing to make the evening and the week typical, he doubtless brings together events and people he remembers so as to make a sort of composite picture. The newspaper he mentions is said to have in it items of news about the Creek Indians, also a mention of the raid of McGregor in Costa Rica. The troubles with the Creek Indians extended for several years before and after the year 1820, and McGregor is said to have operated in Costa Rica in 1822. Mr. Pickard's *Whittier Land* tells us that George Haskell, the school teacher of the poem, taught in the Whittier district in the winter of 1823, also that Sewell's *History of the Quakers*, from which Mrs. Whittier obtained some of the stories she told, was published in the same year. These things seem to locate the action some time near the winter of 1822–23 when Greenleaf, the future poet, was about fifteen years of age.

L. 16: The ocean shore was only twelve or fifteen miles from their home.

L. 22: *Herd's grass.* The same as timothy, named from Timothy Hanson, who carried the seed from New England to Maryland in 1720.

L. 25: *Stanchion.* The stanchions of that time were made of upright poles and a bow of hickory or walnut was so attached as to be put around the necks of the cattle to fasten them in the stalls.

L. 33–36: The motion of the falling flakes is compared to to that of swarming bees. The Whittiers kept bees in the garden near the well-sweep, and doubtless the children had often seen them swarming.

L. 62: *Chinese roof.* The well-curb, of course, had no cover for the snow to rest on. Whittier once explained that a board lay across one edge of it for the pail to rest on, and on this the snow piled up in the shape of the roof of a Chinese pagoda.

L. 65: *Pisa's leaning miracle.* A beautiful white tower in Pisa, Italy, 180 feet high and leaning 14 feet from the perpendicular.

L. 70: *Buskins.* Very high shoes.

L. 81: *Aladdin.* The boys had read the story of Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp, from the *Arabian Nights.* Aladdin was a Chinese boy who was presented with a magic ring and sent into a cave filled with gold and jewels by an African magician who had evil designs on him. The magician failed in his designs, Aladdin found a lamp of "supernal powers" in the cave, and by means of the lamp and the ring grew rich and powerful. It is one of the great short stories of the world. Read it.

L. 90: *Amun.* The Egyptians made stone images of rams and worshiped them as the god Amun or Ammun. The ram in the barn stood so still and stared so that he made Whittier think of one of those stone images come to life.

L. 97: *Church-bell.* When the wind was in the right direction they could hear the church bells from Haverhill and Newbury.

L. 136: *Crane,* etc. The crane was an iron bar fastened to the wall of the fire place by a hinge so that it could be swung out over the blaze. "Pendent" means hanging. Trammels were strips of iron with a hook at each end. In cooking, a trammel was hung on the crane, the kettle was hung on the lower hook of the trammel, and swung around over the fire.

L. 160: *Frost-line.* See dictionary for general meaning of frost-line. Whittier means here that the red logs sent out so much heat they could sit farther away from the fire without having their backs chilly.

L. 168: *Couchant tiger.* The cat was near the fire and on a level with it, so its shadow was large.

L. 199: *Conscious floor.* The loneliness is so great that even the floor seems to be conscious of it. This is a figure of speech called "transferred epithet." The feeling of the person is transferred to the floor.

L. 204: *Cypress-trees.* An evergreen tree, tall, dark, and even more slim and pointed than a Lombardy poplar. Its shape suggests a church steeple or a tall, pointed monument. Anciently used at funerals and to decorate tombs, it became an emblem of sorrow for the dead. It is now much planted in graveyards, and in Italy some graveyards are surrounded by a wall of cypress trees. The star is much used in literature as a symbol of hope. So in lines 204–205 Whittier says figuratively that he pities one who has no hope of seeing his dead friends again.

L. 207: *Mournful marbles.* Gravestones. The breaking day or light of dawn shining over the mournful marbles is used here as a symbol of the hope of a resurrection.

L. 215: "*The Chief,*" etc. Gambia is a river in Africa. This line and the four quoted lines below are said to be from a poem by Mrs. Sarah Wentworth Marton entitled "The African Chief."

L. 225: *Memphremagog.* Find the lake on a map of New England.

L. 226: *Moose and samp.* The food referred to is the flesh of a kind of north-woods deer, and mush made from pounded Indian corn.

L. 229: *St. François* (San Fran-swa). The name of a small stream north of Lake Memphremagog, and of a French settlement on its banks.

L. 231: *On Norman cap,* etc. Zone here means waist. The bodice was a wide laced belt reaching from the waist line nearly to the arms. The French girls wore caps and bodices.

L. 236: *Nearer home.* The Salisbury marshes were only a few miles from their home.

L. 242: *Boar's Head.* A headland overlooking the ocean a little north of Salisbury. The Isles of Shoals lie off shore a short distance east of Boar's Head.

L. 244: *Hake.* A kind of fish.

L. 254: *Gundelow.* A heavy, flat-bottomed boat.

L. 259: *Cocheco.* A small town, now Dover, New Hampshire, where Mrs. Whittier had lived when a child. The Indian raid occurred in 1689.

L. 270: *Gray wizard.* The wizard was a Mr. Bantam who lived near Mrs. Whittier's childhood home and owned the "conjuring book," of which the poet afterward obtained possession.

L. 274: *Piscataqua.* A river near Cocheco.

L. 286: *Painful Sewell,* etc. A tome is a volume. The book in which Mrs. Whittier had read the stories of martyrdom she told was Sewell's *History of the Quakers.* It was "painful" because it told of so many cruel persecutions.

L. 289: *Chalkley's Journal.* Another book in which Chalkley, a Quaker preacher and sea-captain, gave a history of his own life in the form of a journal.

L. 305: *By Him who,* etc. See Gen. 22: 13.

L. 310: *Lyceum.* School.

L. 313: *Divine.* Make out by inspiration, predict.

L. 314. *Occult.* Hidden.

L. 315. *Holding,* etc. Cunning-warded, carefully guarded. The keys to the woods were so carefully guarded that most people never found them. But Uncle Moses had possession of them.

L. 320: *Apollonius.* A Greek philosopher who lived soon after Christ and was believed to be able to talk with birds and animals.

L. 322: *Hermes.* An Egyptian priest. The cranes of the river Nile were considered sacred. Sage means wise.

L. 331: *As Surrey hills*, etc. Gilbert White, an Englishman, loved his own neighborhood, Selborne, as much as Uncle Moses did his. He wrote a book about it in which he spoke of his native hills as if they were as important as mountains.

L. 333: *Teal.* A kind of wild duck. Loon, a diving bird. It makes an uncanny noise, sounding like laughter, that can be heard for a long distance.

L. 361: *Huskings*, etc. It was the custom when that work used to be done by hand, to invite companies of young people to come together and husk corn or pare apples. They worked for two or three hours, then were given a supper, after which they played games.

L. 362: *Weaving through*, etc. The figure in this and the next two lines is metaphor because it assumes a resemblance between the way she tells her stories and the weaving of a piece of cloth with warp of homespun yarn and woof of gold.

L. 369: *Mirage.* See dictionary. The figure in the line is metaphor because it assumes a resemblance between a beautiful mirage seen in the distance and the fact that life as she looked into the future still seemed to her beautiful and worth while.

L. 370–371: *Morning dew*, etc. Metaphor, meant to show that in her maturity she still kept her youthful feelings and interests.

L. 392: *Held.* Considered.

L. 407–412: *Brier and harebell . . . . the hillside flowers she loved.* "When we came to Pleasant Valley, he [the poet] stopped the carriage at a picturesque wooded knoll, and said that here he used to come with his sister to gather harebells. He gathered a handful of them which lighted up his garden-room for several days."—From Pickard's *Whittier Land.*

L. 439: *The master.* George Haskell from Maine, a Dartmouth College student. Whittier greatly admired him

and was much influenced by him. He became a physician, inspired many young men to secure an education, and helped found several schools.

L. 454: *Scholar's gown.* All college students at that time wore caps and long black gowns.

L. 476: *Pindus-born Arachthus.* Pindus, the name of a chain of mountains in Greece. Arachthus or Araxes, the name of a river that rises in the Pindus range, hence is "Pindus-born."

L. 478: *Olympus.* A mountain in Greece which was believed to be the home of the gods. Hence it was "dread" or awe-inspiring.

L. 510: *Another guest.* Daughter of a judge who lived across the river in Newburyport. At this time she thought she was converted to the Quaker belief, and was glad to be among them as much as possible.

L. 536: *Petruchio's Kate.* Kate, a high-tempered lady, is the shrew in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew.* Petruchio is the young nobleman who undertakes to tame her.

L. 537: *Siena's saint.* St. Catherine, a woman who lived in Siena, Italy, in the fourteenth century. Her house is still shown there, also many pictures in which she is represented as feeding the poor and performing miracles.

L. 550: *Smyrna.* A city in Asia Minor. Malta, an island in the Mediterranean near Sicily. The streets of some of the towns, paved with stone, end toward the water in steep flights of steps.

L. 555: *Crazy Queen.* Lady Hester Stanhope, an Englishwoman, niece of William Pitt, becoming dissatisfied with society in England, went to the mountains of Lebanon in Palestine and lived among their half-wild tribes. She obtained so much influence over the people there that they regarded her almost as a queen. Harriet Livermore visited her and, for a time, they seemed congenial spirits. They both expected the speedy second

coming of Christ. Two white horses were kept saddled on one of which Lady Hester expected to ride with the Lord into Jerusalem. When Miss Livermore discovered this she thought the honor belonged to herself, and they quarreled.

L. 569: *Fatal sisters.* The three Fates, according to the belief of the ancient Greeks, were deities who had control of the lives of human beings; one of them, Clotho, decided when they were to be born, another, Lachesis, decided how long they were to live, the third, Atropos, determined how they were to die.

L. 659: *Wise old Doctor.* Dr. Elias Weld, who lived at Rocks Village, on the road from the farm to Amesbury. He was a lover of poetry and although much older than Whittier they were great friends. Whittier dedicated his poem "The Countess" to Dr. Weld.

L. 669: *Inward light.* The Quakers depended for guidance as to what they were to do or not do upon the "inward light" or direct communication from God to each individual.

L. 669: *Mail of Calvin's creed.* John Calvin, who set forth the beliefs adopted by the Presbyterians about 350 years ago. These doctrines were so strong that they are sometimes said to be "iron-clad." Hence Whittier, in metaphor, speaks of the doctor's beliefs as a coat of mail.

L. 767: *Almanac.* Calendars had not been invented. The Almanac was indispensable and in many homes was the only book. It hung over the candle-stand by the fireplace ready for use. It gave information on many subjects. *Poor Richard's Almanac* by Benjamin Franklin has been called the "masterpiece among Almanacs." Those of Whittier's early days were doubtless imitations of Poor Richard.

L. 678: *Books and pamphlets.* Whittier said that his first attempt at poetry was the making of a rhymed list of the books in this library. Pickard gives the list in *Whittier Land.*

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L. 683: *Drab-skirted Muse*, etc. The Greeks believed that they were helped to write their poetry and create their works of art by nine glorious goddesses called the Muses. Ellwood, the author of the long poem on "The Wars of David and the Jews," was a Quaker and perhaps regarded the literature inspired by the Greek Muses as worldly and wicked. The Greek Muses wore graceful, flowing robes, so Whittier says jokingly that Ellwood was inspired by a meek Quaker Muse who wore a drab skirt as the Quaker women did.

L. 691: *Panoramic*. See dictionary for panorama.

L. 693: *Creeks*, etc. News was in the paper of the Creek Indians, who had been driven by Gen. Jackson from their homes in Georgia and afterward made more or less trouble; of Sir Gregor McGregor, a Scotchman who was trying to establish a colony in Costa Rica, also of an insurrection of the Greeks against the Turks. Taygetus is a mountain in Greece, Ypsilanti was a Grecian leader, and his followers were from the province of Maina in Greece.

L. 700: *Rustic Muse*. A poem probably written by some aspiring poet of the vicinity, hence the product of the "rustic Muse."

L. 728: *Amaranths*. An imaginary fadeless flower used in poetry as a symbol of death and immortality. See Longfellow's *The Two Angels*.

L. 730: *Sands*, etc. See dictionary for hour-glass.

L. 739: *The century's*. A way of saying that the present day is always the most important day of the year. If the aloe blooms only once in a century, the day on which it blooms is its greatest day.

L. 741: *Truce of God*. An agreement among the quarrelsome barons of the twelfth century that on certain days no fighting should be done.

L. 747: The Flemish paintings were often pictures of the interiors of homes.

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